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ABSTRACT

This action research project sought to improve student motivation in order to increase academic performance among eighth graders in an urban community. Evidence of academic underachievement and lack of student participation was documented by means of teacher observations, incomplete and missing assignments, and student questionnaires. Student, parent, and teacher surveys were administered at the beginning of the 1999-2000 school year, and a modified version of the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire was also administered to measure students' motivation. Four major interventions were implemented: the requirement of an assignment notebook, increased parental awareness through academic progress reports, implementation of motivationally oriented content, and development of students' organizational and study skills. In addition, a variety of cooperative learning and social skill activities were incorporated. Post-intervention data indicated an overall improvement in many areas, including completion of homework, feelings about instructors, interest in class content, and academic achievement. The incorporation of cooperative learning and multiple intelligence lessons was found to strengthen student motivational levels and academic achievement. (Eight appendices include survey forms and a sample student progress report. Contains 25 references.) (EV)

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USING MOTIVATIONAL STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

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An Action Research Project Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the School of Education in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Teaching and Leadership

Saint Xavier University & SkyLight
Field-Based Masters Program
Chicago, Illinois

May, 2000

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USING MOTIVATIONAL STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

Abstract

This report described a program for improving student motivation to increase academic performance. The targeted population consisted of middle school eighth grade students in an urban community of approximately 43,000. Evidence of academic underachievement and lack of student participation were documented from teacher observations, incomplete and missing assignments, and student questionnaires. Student, parent, and teacher surveys were administered at the beginning of the 1999-2000 school year. A modified version of the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire was also administered measuring students' motivation.

Analysis of the probable cause data indicated the lack of parental involvement, the lack of interest in academic matters, and the lack of self-esteem contributed to the problem. Peer relationships, feelings of alienation or not belonging, and lack of organizational skills may also have contributed to a lack of student motivation.

A review of solution strategies suggested by knowledgeable others, combined with an analysis of the problem setting, resulted in the selection of four major interventions which included: the requirement of an assignment notebook, increased parental awareness through academic progress reports, implementation of motivationally oriented content, and the development of students' organizational and study skills. In addition, a variety of cooperative learning and social skill activities were incorporated.

After analysis of the data collected, the research indicates an overall improvement in many areas. These areas included student completion of homework, feelings about instructors, interest in class content, and student academic achievement. The incorporation of cooperative learning and multiple intelligence lessons was found to strengthen student motivational levels and academic achievement. The interventions used in this program could enhance the learning process when utilized in any classroom.

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

Problem Statement

The students of the targeted eighth grade class exhibited a lack of motivation that interfered with their academic achievement. Evidence of the problem was displayed by observations regarding the lack of active student participation in class, anecdotal journal entries, missing assignments, and low academic achievement.

Local Setting

This urban middle school housed 577 students in grades seven and eight. The school population was diverse with 77.6% Caucasian, 4.5% African American, 17.0% Hispanic, 0.9% Asian Pacific Islander, and 0.2% Native American students. Instruction was provided through four cooperative teams. Interdisciplinary instruction challenged students with higher order thinking lessons and hands-on tasks. Partnerships with the local and business community contributed to the enriched education of the students.

The school's 1998 report card showed an attendance rate of 92.2% and a truancy rate of 0.7%. The school district administers the Illinois Goal Assessment Program (IGAP) test

annually. Students scored high on all areas of the test with scores in the eightieth percentile in the areas of science, social science, reading, mathematics, and writing.

Within the district, the average teacher had 16.1 years of experience. Fifty percent of the teachers held a bachelor's degree and 50% held a master's degree or above. The pupil to teacher ratio in the school was 18 to 1. The faculty consisted of 37 certified professionals who were committed to the use of the team approach.

The instructional teams consisted of a variety of core members and a number of specialists. The core curricular requirements included social sciences, language arts, science, mathematics, and physical education. Family and Consumer Science and Industrial Technology courses were required on a semester basis. One quarter each was spent in the following encore classes: general music, art, computer, and health. Team members shared 90 minutes of common planning and preparatory time. The time was devoted to team meetings, planning of interdisciplinary units, and the discussion of student concerns. Unique to the middle school was the fact that students were assigned to one core team and remained with that group of teachers throughout the school year.

The building was located in a residential neighborhood surrounded by large grass fields and oak trees. The four story brick building was built in 1930 and of Gothic architecture. The building housed 30 classrooms, a gymnasium, a cafeteria, an auditorium, a library, and several smaller offices. The grounds included four tennis courts, three baseball diamonds, a football field, and a track facility.

A wide variety of programs was offered to students to fulfill the school philosophy in the student handbook. The philosophy set forth the goal that each student may "become contributing and productive citizens responsive to the changing local and global needs now and in the twenty-

first century." The curriculum allowed for the individual interest and needs of students and was also sensitive to the demands of parents in the community.

Basic academic and encore classes were provided, along with several extracurricular and athletic activities. These included athletic opportunities in football, cross country, tennis, volleyball, wrestling, basketball, swimming, and track. Some of the extracurricular activities offered were cheerleading, chess club, drama, jazz band, peer helpers and mediators, newspaper, science club, student council, trendsetters, and yearbook. The middle school concept used in this school was one that promoted success and provided self-esteem. Through these opportunities the social and developmental needs of the middle school student were addressed.

Community Setting

The district in which the action research project took place was located in northwest Illinois on the east bank of the Mississippi River. The metropolitan area had a population of 350,000. The city's population was 42,757 with a median age of 36.5. Median household income of $30,991 was reported, with 29.7% of the population having an income below $19,999 and 25.9% of the population having an income of above $50,000.

In the past 24 months, the area underwent huge economic developments, including over 800,000 square feet of retail development and the creation of over 1,000 new jobs. This community had an overall unemployment rate of 3.9 %. The area's major employer was the world's largest farm implement manufacturer, which employed more than 10,000 people. There were also 62 other manufacturing facilities in the city that provided 3,200 jobs. In addition, the wholesale and retail trade establishments provided employment to an additional 1,300 people. The city itself employed 400 full-time employees and 200 part-time workers.

There were four major interstates and four separate railroad companies that serviced the area. An international airport was located within the city. The airport provided daily freight and passenger service to national and international cities. The city was located on the Mississippi River, which was open to navigation 10 months of the year. Over 39 million tons of barge freight moved through the area annually.

There were extensive educational offerings in the community. Private and parochial schools at all levels, three trade and technical schools, two junior colleges, two universities, one four year college, and one specialized chiropractic college were located in the area. The specific public school district in which the research took place had 12 elementary schools, 2 middle schools, and a high school. Various programs were offered throughout the district: special needs preschool, special needs support services, gifted education, high school Advanced Placement, vocal and instrumental music, visual and performance arts, comprehensive college preparatory, vocational education work, computer education, and intramural athletics. Seventy-three percent of the population graduated, with 58% of the students graduating in college preparatory programs.

A local issue that impacted the area was a shift in administrative policy and leadership. A new superintendent was appointed in 1997. A new curriculum director was appointed and assumed duties in the fall of 1999. The state retention policy became an issue in the 1998-1999 school year. Under this policy students could not be socially promoted from one grade to the next. This caused uncertainty in the education profession and in the community due to lack of communication and information.

National Context of the Problem

Researchers have demonstrated that a problem exists concerning motivation and academic performance for many children as they move from the elementary school into the middle school. The nature of motivational change, as students enter middle school, is directly related to the learning environment within the classroom. The social and biological changes that occur as students reach the adolescent years often affect students' self esteem and motivation to succeed. In addition, students' perceptions of their experiences within education have a tendency to influence their motivational levels more than the reality of those experiences. Allowing student choices and input in classroom decision making may increase the students' sense of self-determination, hence heightening motivational levels (Anderman & Midgley, 1998).

Researchers revealed that students often express a desire to do well in school, yet lack the behaviors needed to achieve that success (Robinson, 1994). Insufficient use of higher-order thinking skills, the inability to transfer learning, and the lack of self-motivation indicated the lack of student ownership of learning (Bujan, 1996). These behaviors contribute to poor academic achievement and low motivation in middle school students.

Researchers support the idea that teaching strategies may have a positive effect on various concepts related to intrinsic motivation, such as self esteem, self concept, and self satisfaction. Teachers' awareness must exist regarding appropriate motivational strategies that positively reinforce student willingness and enthusiasm (Beluzo, et al., 1997). Researchers conducted a study reflecting motivational problems do exist in middle schools. This was documented by means of academic grades, homework contract referrals, surveys, and teacher observations (Lane, Marquardt, Meyer, and Murray, 1997). Several factors contribute to the

inadequate levels of student motivation. These factors include poor self-esteem, unchallenging, repetitive assignments, emotionally stressful classroom environments, and extensive use of extrinsic rewards (Eisele, 1996).

National concern of the lack of motivation of middle school students has been well established and documented through professional research. Studies have shown that students have difficulty with the transition from elementary school to middle school. This difficulty can be related to the sudden biological, social, and developmental changes that occur in the adolescent years. This transitional process may lead to problems in students' academic achievement. These problems have led to several documented areas of concern. Often middle school students show a lack of self-discipline and responsibility for learning. Alternative teaching strategies combined with an enriched environment may provide the tools necessary for student success.

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

In order to document the extent of students' lack of motivation to complete homework assignments, a student survey was administered at the beginning of the 1999 – 2000 school year (Appendix A). Graphs were created illustrating the results of student responses regarding missing assignments and late or incomplete assignments. Written comments made by the students were examined.

The student survey questions provided data on students' perceptions of school, classes, and homework. Students were asked the importance of completing homework. Of the total number of students surveyed, 50% always completed all of their homework, 44% feel they complete their homework most of the time, while 6% admitted to not completing their homework (Figure 1). Students were also asked to estimate the amount of time spent completing homework assignments in the evening (Figure 2). 19% of students spent more than one hour while 20% spent less than half an hour on homework each night. The majority of students, 61%, spent between one-half and one hour on homework completion. The data also indicated that 54% of the students generally liked their teachers while 43% had neutral feelings towards them (Figure 3). Only 7% thought that classes were usually somewhat boring (Figure 4). The following figures represent the data collected from the student survey.

Figure 1. Students' Perceptions of Homework Completion

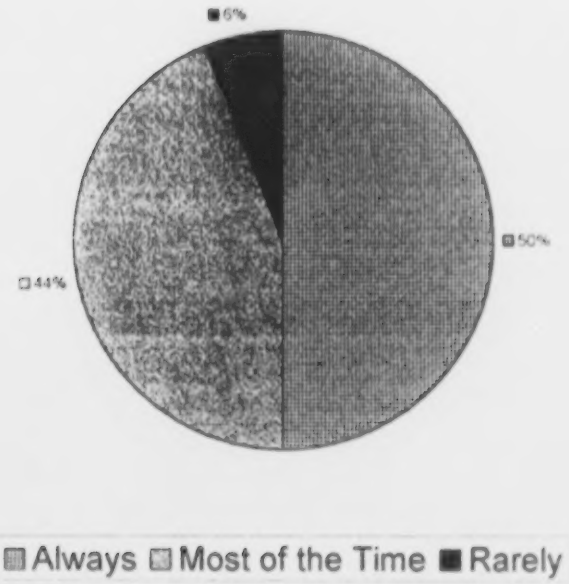


Figure 2. Amount of Time Spent on Homework

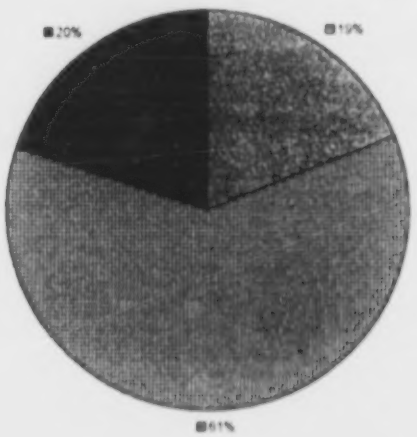


Figure 3. Students' Feelings Toward Teachers

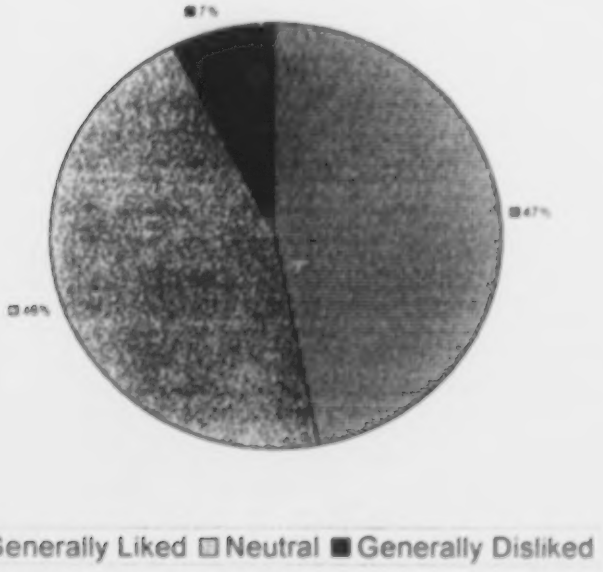
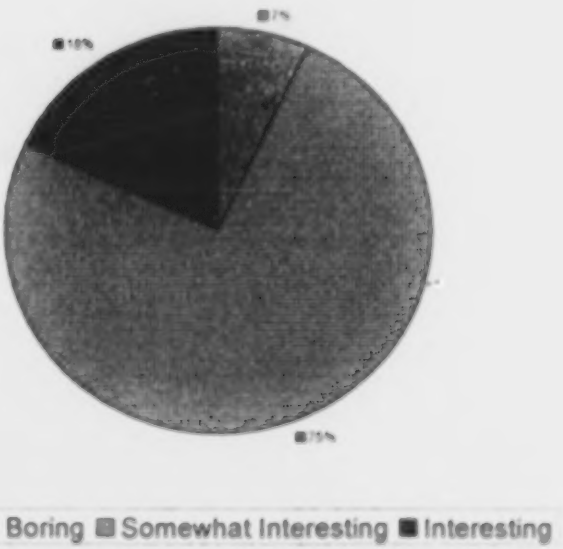


Figure 4. Students' Opinions of Courses



The final question on the student survey was an open-ended question asking why students do, or do not, complete their homework. Several trends were evident in their responses. The majority of the students' comments stated that their reason for completing homework was to achieve a good grade in the course. A wide population of the responses stated that they wanted to get good grades so that they could advance to college and have a successful career. Also many students commented that they completed their homework to please their parents and for self-satisfaction. Students who stated that they did not complete their homework made comments regarding time management and organizational skills.

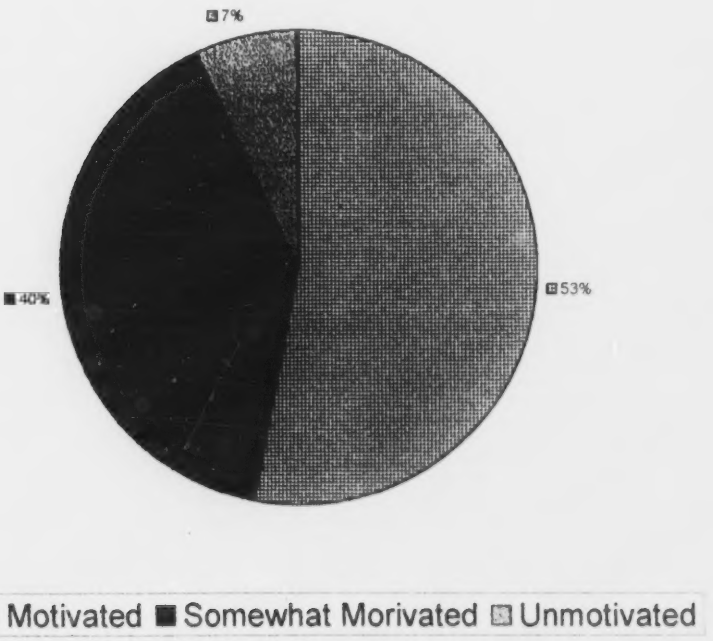
The researchers' next step was to administer a questionnaire to assess students' motivation, goals, and beliefs about their skills to succeed in school. The survey was designed using the Motivational Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (Pintrich, Smith, Garcia, & McKeachie, 1991). Item descriptions given in the Motivation Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ) were simplified for students and used for the questionnaire (Appendix B). Modifications were intended to increase the readability of the test and allow students to complete the survey without direct teacher interaction.

As the statements were read aloud, students were asked to choose a response that best described themselves. Questions were arranged such that no two questions from the same component were next to each other. The following figures represent the motivational components of information provided by the results of the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (Figures 5). The higher the score, the more intrinsically motivated the students ranked themselves; the lower the score, the more extrinsically motivated they were.

The Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire was administered at the beginning

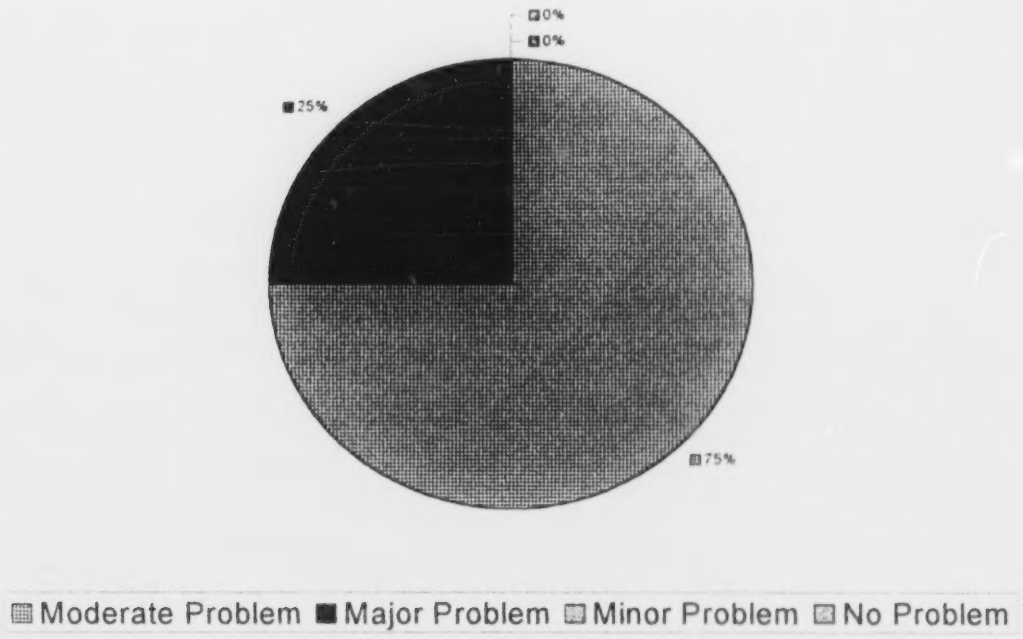
of the intervention period to all students. Figure 5 revealed data of the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaires. It showed the percentage of very motivated students at 53%. The percentage of students who were somewhat motivated at 40%, and the percentage of unmotivated students at 7%.

Figure 5. Students' Motivational lLevels



A teacher survey was administered at the start of the school year to assess teachers' feeling of students' motivation levels (Appendix C). Responses from the teacher survey revealed two thirds of the teachers felt that missing, late, or incomplete work was a problem in their classroom. To emphasize this point teachers were asked how many students had at least one missing assignment. Seventy-five percent of the students were found to be missing at least one assignment (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Teacher Perceptions of Homework Problems



Some of the other comments collected from the teacher survey were that teachers encourage their students to stay after school to make up their assignments, but the final responsibility goes to the student to seek help or report to a teacher to do the work. This group of teachers also place a large percentage of their course grade on homework

Probable Causes

Problems facing the targeted eighth grade students can be traced to a variety of site-based factors: lack of parental involvement, socioeconomic factors, boredom in the classroom, and the period of adolescence.

Lack of parental involvement is a problem in today's society. Many children live in a

household where both parents work outside of the home. Employed parents find it difficult to balance work, home, and children. Single parent homes are seen more in today's society than in past times.

Socioeconomic factors contribute to a lack of motivation. In society today, education is not valued as highly and children tend to be direct reflections of their parents. Students' beliefs and actions tend to mirror parents' beliefs and actions. Non-academic activities sometimes take precedence over academic activities, thus sending the message that homework can be skipped (O'Neil, 1996).

Boredom is another symptom of students' lack of motivation which surfaces in situations where students are required to learn material that personally does not interest them; feel a lack of control in selection of activities; lack the skills necessary to be successful in academic work; or lack an adequate amount of support and encouragement from parents and teachers (McCombs, 1994).

An unorganized and poorly managed classroom can create an environment where students are unlikely to be motivated. Students must be provided with academic activities that promote decision making and have real life relevance (Berreth & Berman, 1997). It is unreasonable to expect students to be motivated if they are continually given tasks that are not meaningful.

Another cause that may contribute to the decline of motivation is the period of adolescence itself. During this period, students become more self conscious and self aware, and thinking is growing more critical and complex. Parents and teachers complain that students are behind in performance and motivation. This is a difficult time for middle school students due to physical growth, psychological growth, and social needs. Students are often inconsistent in

behavior, overly sensitive to criticism, and are often argumentative and rebellious toward authority figures (Forte & Schurr, 1993).

Still another cause could be educational programs with little adaptation made for the differences in learning styles. Children all bring something different to the classroom. According to Gardner's multiple intelligences theory, students who are not encouraged to expand their strengths in all the intelligences are more likely to become discouraged learners, lose confidence, and eventually give up entirely (Chapman, 1993).

A summary of the probable causes for the lack of student motivation at the site and from the professional literature includes the following:

1. lack of parental involvement
2. socioeconomic factors
3. lack of interest in academic matters
4. nonacademic activities
5. change in the family structure
6. adolescent's physical growth, psychological growth, and social needs
7. lack of social interaction and acceptance
8. lack of adequate support and encouragement
9. lack of educational programs incorporating multiple intelligences
10. lack of student understanding of course material
11. lack of meaningful assignments
12. lack of opportunities for student choice
13. chaotic learning environment

These probable causes cited from professional literature and derived from a study of the local

site, allowed the researchers to establish the areas of concern with motivation in the middle school student.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

Analysis of probable causes revealed that poor academic motivation was a major concern of educators. The researchers suggested the following probable causes: the period of adolescence, lack of meaningful assignments, lack of opportunities for student choice, lack of support and encouragement, negative learning environment, and limited educational programs. Researchers have numerous opinions on how to increase student responsibility for their own learning. Some of the methods include: increasing parental support, creating a sense of being cared for, teaching respect and responsibility, restructuring teaching methods to include cooperative learning, and the application of multiple intelligences in the classroom.

After examining the literature many definitions of motivation were found. Lumsden (1994) believed that student motivation included the desire to participate in the learning process. McCombs (1994) stated that motivation was both a predisposition to learning and a perception of the value of that learning (O'Neil 1994).

Motivation for learning has two dimensions: intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. Weinstein and Brown (1994) stated that students achieve a sense of accomplishment and pleasure from having done things well. The sense of accomplishment will reward

intrinsically motivated students because they do not have to be bribed or pressured into completing tasks. These students will set their own goals and work to achieve them, undertaking tasks that they find to be both personally satisfying and interesting. Intrinsic motivation comes from within. In contrast, extrinsically motivated students will perform a task to earn a reward or to escape punishment. These individuals do not perceive themselves as being self determining or competent (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Extrinsic motivation is not inherent but learned by general experience through modeling, communication of expectations, and socialization by parents and teachers (Brophy, 1987). Hootstein (1994) connected extrinsic motivation with a lack of interest in academic matters, resulting in lower academic achievement and decreased attention span.

Educators have become acutely aware that rewards and punishments are not always effective and in many cases are counterproductive. These extrinsic factors elicit temporary compliance at best (Kohn, 1993). Because extrinsic motivators do not produce lasting changes in attitudes or behavior, they can actually be detrimental to the development of intrinsic motivation. When considering these two types of motivation, emphasis on intrinsic motivation within the classroom setting seems to be the better long-term solution. A realistic goal was to ensure that all students experience some level of intrinsic motivation for at least part of the time. This included helping all students realize that learning can be enjoyable and satisfying, not that it always would be (Spaulding, 1992).

A vital component of student success in school is the collaboration between parents and teachers. Lickona (1992) believed that parents need to be involved in their students' education and that the community must also be involved. Goodman, Suttan, and Harkavy (1995) stated that by encouraging parent participation in parent teacher organizations and workshops, the communication between parents, community, and school may improve. Often negative feelings

and attitudes of parents towards school are reflected through their children's school experiences. Parents need to have positive interaction with the school to help teach responsibility of learning.

The first solution strategy focused on utilizing cooperative learning strategies in the classroom. Cooperative learning is a successful strategy in which teams worked together building trust and sharing successes in order to complete a specific task. The researchers showed that cooperative learning, used correctly, could benefit everyone (Bellanca & Fogarty, 1997).

Cooperative learning teaches students how to work with others, learn from others, and be responsible. Social skills taught through group activities enable students to accept, understand, and develop an interest in content (Williams, 1994). The social skills taught will help students function better within the classroom as well as outside the classroom.

The second solution strategy was the incorporation of the multiple intelligences into the classroom and modification of teaching methods to nurture those intelligences. Chapman (1993) stated that students learn in a multitude of fashions. Teachers need to recognize that each student has a different set of strengths and talents. Through students' identification of their own intelligences, they will be better able to contribute effectively towards their cooperative group. Greenhawk (1997) stated that through the identification of multiple intelligences students recognize their abilities, use strengths to improve weaknesses, build confidence, allow risk taking, and become engaged in the learning process.

There are several factors that affect student motivation. Teachers must exhibit excitement and enthusiasm in the classroom. Attitude must be coupled with lessons that are meaningful and relevant and that are easily transferred to everyday life. Increased parent contact and a promotion of an open school policy will provide a more positive attitude towards school by parents, students and teachers (Rozycki, 1996).

Specific areas were examined to document the problem of lack of motivation. These included intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, parental contact, cooperative learning, multiple intelligence instruction and teacher attitude. Interventions used to address these issues were to increase the amount of parental contact, utilize cooperative learning and multiple intelligences strategies, examine students' foundation for motivation, and teach relevant, real-world lessons.

OBJECTIVE AND PROCESS STATEMENTS

Solutions suggested by researchers combined with an analysis of the site resulted in the following objective:

As a result of implementing cooperative learning activities, motivational teaching strategies, and multiple intelligence instruction during the period of September 1999 through December 1999, the eighth grade students from the targeted classes will increase their intrinsic and extrinsic motivation as measured by teacher observation checklists, academic performance, and journal entries.

Process to be used to implement this objective include the following:

1. Prepare lesson plans using cooperative learning, motivational teaching strategies, and multiple intelligences.
2. Assist students with goal setting, organization, and study skills.
3. Function as a positive role model and assist students' social skill development.

Solutions suggested by researchers combined with an analysis of the site resulted in the following objective:

As a result of increased communication between parents, teachers, and students during the period of September 1999 through December 1999, the eighth grade students from the targeted classes will become more aware of the importance of academic achievement as measured by student-led conferences, phone contacts, progress reports, newsletters, and surveys.

Process to be used to implement this objective include the following:

1. Participate in student led conferencing.
2. Establish an open door policy for parents by making phone calls, sending progress reports and newsletters home with students on a regular basis.
3. Utilize input and suggestions gathered from parent surveys and phone calls.

ACTION PLAN

The action plan for the research project was designed to include the use of cooperative learning, multiple intelligence units, motivational teaching strategies, and communication

strategies. The first three weeks of the school year were used to acquaint the researchers with their targeted groups. The intervention period was begun in September, 1999 and continued for twelve weeks ending in December, 1999. The targeted classes followed the general action plan outline listed below.

Week 1

I. Data collection to evidence the problem
   - A. Send home letter to parents
   - B. Conduct Teacher Surveys
   - C. Assess students' motivation using the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire
   - D. Discuss appropriate cooperative behavior
   - E. Discuss grade reports / updates sent home every other week
   - F. Begin use of Observation Checklist
     1. Incomplete assignments
     2. Missing assignments
     3. Late assignments
     4. D grade
     5. F grade
     6. Disciplinary referral
   - G. Write weekly entry in implementation journal
   - H. Develop new lessons emphasizing organization and cooperative learning

Weeks 2

II. Compiling of Data
   - A. Compile results of Teacher Surveys
   - B. Compile results of Student Surveys
   - C. Tally results of Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire
   - D. Send home Parent Survey
   - E. Send home assignment sheets / grade reports
   - F. Use Observation Checklist
   - G. Write weekly entry in Implementation Journal
   - H. Develop new lessons emphasizing organization and cooperative learning

Week 3 -6

III. Teaching of skills
   - A. Review requirements of all students (binders, assignment notebook, etc.)
   - B. Organizational and study skills activities
     1. assignment notebooks
     2. note taking skills
     3. graphic organizer usage
     4. time management skills
     5. active reading strategies
   - C. Specific subject matter lesson plans using cooperative learning activities (2-3 times weekly)

D. Continue development of new lessons emphasizing organization and cooperative learning
E. Student reflection of learning (journal writing)
F. Use Observation Checklist
G. Write weekly entry in Implementation Journal
H. Send home assignment sheets / grade reports (every other week)
I. Students set personal and academic goals
J. Social skill development - lessons

Week 7

IV. Multiple Intelligences - overview
A. Introduce the theory of multiple intelligence
B. Administer multiple intelligence inventory
C. Model different intelligences to the class
D. Create brain drawing of perceived strengths
E. Use Observation Checklist
F. Write weekly entry in Implementation Journal

Week 8

V. Multiple Intelligences - verbal/linguistic and musical/rhythmic
A. Incorporate a lesson using the verbal/linguistic intelligence
B. Students will write a reflection of lesson
C. Incorporate a lesson using musical/rhythmic intelligence
D. Students will write a reflection of the lesson
E. Use Observation Checklist
F. Write weekly entry in Implementation Journal
G. Send home assignment sheets / grade reports
H. Student led conferences

Week 9

VI. Multiple Intelligences - logical / mathematical and visual / spatial
A. Incorporate a lesson using the logical / mathematical intelligence
B. Students will write a reflection of the lesson
C. Incorporate a lesson using the visual / spatial intelligence
D. Students will write a reflection of the lesson
E. Use Observation Checklist
F. Write weekly entry in Implementation Journal

Week 10

VII. Multiple Intelligences - bodily / kinesthetic and intrapersonal
A. Incorporate a lesson using the bodily / kinesthetic intelligence
B. Students will write a reflection of the lesson
C. Incorporate a lesson using the intrapersonal intelligence
D. Students will write a reflection of the lesson
E. Use Observation Checklist
F. Write weekly entry in Implementation Journal
G. Send home assignment sheets / grade reports

Week 11

VIII. Multiple Intelligences – interpersonal and summary

A. Incorporate a lesson on interpersonal intelligence
B. Students will write a reflection of the lesson
C. Students will write an overall reflection of multiple intelligences
D. Use Observation Checklist
E. Write weekly entry in Implementation Journal
F. Administer posttest of Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire

Week 12

IX. Final compilation of data

To assess the effectiveness of this action research project several different items were examined. Grades from the first and second quarters were compared to note any significant changes. Also a posttest of the MSLQ was administered to gain insight on students' changes of motivational levels. Using these assessment tools the researchers were able to determine the level of effectiveness of the action research project.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of Intervention

The objective of this project was to use motivational strategies to improve academic achievement of middle school students. Pre-intervention and post-intervention surveys were administered to provide data on students' perceptions of school, classes, and homework. On-task observations measured incomplete assignments, organizational skills, disruptive behavior, and academic achievement. Multiple Intelligence Inventories were given with complete explanation of each intelligence. The inventories were used to identify students' learning strengths. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivational levels were surveyed by the Motivated for Strategies for Learning Questionnaire administered to students at the beginning of the intervention period.

Students were introduced to the concepts of cooperative learning through organized heterogeneous base groups. These groups were formed by placing four students together by examining their academic, social, and leadership skills. Students were assigned for the duration of the project to a single base group to enhance their cooperation and social skills. Cooperative groups were also used to foster a sense of community within the classroom.

Specific social skills were identified and taught as needed to prepare for cooperative learning. These skills were taught embedded within their content area. These skills included: basic interaction, respect for others, positive feedback, appropriate response, communication,

conflict resolution, listening, and team building. The desirable social skills were taught through modeling and T-charts. Specific roles such as clarifier, materials manager, recorder, timekeeper, and encourager, were explained, modeled, and observed during cooperative learning activities. Cooperative lessons were integrated into the weekly curriculum. At the end of each cooperative learning activity, students were provided time to reflect, discuss, and process the information. Journal writing was used as an additional reflective activity.

Also during this period of time, multiple intelligences theory was introduced. Each of the eight intelligences was introduced into the classroom followed by a specific weekly lesson focusing on the feature intelligence. The Multiple Intelligence Inventory was administered and students evaluated their strengths (Appendix D). These results were then tallied and examined by the researchers. A silhouette of a brain was designed and students color-coded each section to identify the intelligences. The brain was sectioned off proportionally according to the inventory results to represent the students' perceived strengths. This activity was followed up by a reflective summary to remind the students that there are many different ways of learning and each student has a dominant intelligence.

Throughout the twelve week intervention, a major emphasis was placed on student responsibility. Assignment notebooks were used to improve students' organizational skills and to improve communication among teachers, students, and parents. A parent survey was sent home at the beginning of the intervention period (Appendix E) and grade reports were sent home with students on a biweekly basis (Appendix F). These reports requested a parent signature and additional comments. One parent stated that his son was showing a real interest in class and the researchers should "keep up the good lessons." These grade reports helped parents track their child's grades throughout the project.

A variety of teaching strategies was used to assist the students in improving motivation throughout the project implementation period. The process of implementation went according to the outlined action plan and no major deviations from the plan were made.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

Teachers documented and tabulated the number of students' late and incomplete assignments, daily grades, and quarter grades monitored the results of the interventions. Behavior problems and concerns were recorded using anecdotal records and maintained for additional reference. The post-intervention student survey was administered to measure students' perceptions about school, classes, and homework. The Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire was administered to gauge levels of student motivation.

Table 1 shows student perceptions of the importance of homework completion. This table, in comparison to Figure 1, demonstrates an improvement in attitude regarding homework completion during the course of this action research project. This improvement may have been due to the use of cooperative learning and multiple intelligence instruction throughout the intervention period.

Table 1.
Students' perceptions of homework completion (pre and post).

	Pre-intervention	Post-intervention
Always	48	49
Most of the Time	42	43
Never	6	4

Student opinions regarding attitude toward their instructors improved as is illustrated in Table 2. These improved attitudes may have been the result of the researchers implementing new teaching strategies in the classroom.

Table 2.
Student opinion of course instructors.

	Pre-intervention	Post-intervention
Generally Like	44	54
Neutral	43	49
Generally Dislike	7	3

At the beginning of the observation period, 82% of the targeted students completed 90% of their assignments. Twelve weeks later, this number had increased to 85%. The researchers attributed this increase to the constant monitoring of assignment notebooks, increased parental communication through grade sheets, and the incorporation of multiple intelligence instruction and cooperative learning in the classroom.

According to the survey results and grade book data, there was an increase in completed work during the intervention period. The intervention had a positive effect on the number of students displaying responsibility for their academic achievement. Upon further analysis of grades, the researchers noted an overall improvement from the beginning of the intervention to the end. This is displayed in Table 3.

Table 3.
Number of D and F grades in September 1999 and December 1999.

	Pre-intervention	Post-intervention
D grades	40	18
F grades	44	24

Although grades may be considered to be subjective, they are reflective of effort and motivation. From the beginning to the end of the intervention period, the number of D grades decreased by 55% and the number of F grades decreased by 45%. Students' academic achievement improved due to the implementation of the designed academic motivation

interventions. Biweekly progress reports and parental phone contacts also contributed to the increased grade levels.

The comparison of pretest and posttest data of the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaires, showed the percentage of very motivated students increased by 1% to 54%. The percentage of students who were somewhat motivated decreased 1% to 39%, and the percentage of unmotivated students remained stable at 7%. These results are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4.
MSLQ pretest and posttest results on academic motivation

	Pre-intervention	Post-intervention
Very Motivated	53	54
Somewhat Motivated	40	39
Not Motivated	7	7

The percentage increase in both the post-student surveys and the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaires was important. Researchers felt the increase was due to the increased levels of student responsibility and ownership of their learning, the development and strengthening of social skills through cooperative learning, and the integration of multiple intelligence instruction.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the presentation and analysis of the data on completion of homework, feelings about instructors, interest in class content, and student academic achievement, students showed an overall improvement. The researchers concluded that the incorporation of cooperative learning and multiple intelligence lessons strengthened the academic achievement and, by implication, the motivational levels of the students.

Developing and strengthening students' social skills through cooperative learning required a considerable amount of time to prepare, teach, model, and practice. The embedded instruction of social skills was an ongoing focus throughout the intervention period. Cooperative learning had an overall positive effect. However, some students still preferred learning in isolation rather than working cooperatively. Lower achieving students chose to work in groups and thus greatly increased their academic performance. Many students began to work with others, rather than against them competitively, or apart from them, for the welfare of the entire class. These cooperative learning activities helped to establish a sense of community within the classroom.

Introduction of multiple intelligence lessons into the curriculum began with a brief overview of the theory and continued with eight multiple intelligence lessons. Each lesson was followed by a reflective activity focusing on skills that were learned. A final student summary was composed on how each intelligence applied to their lives.

In reviewing the action research, the researchers concluded that the integration of cooperative learning and multiple intelligence instruction was beneficial and enjoyable for students, but time consuming for the classroom teacher. Although the researchers saw an increase in overall motivation, they felt that the time of the intervention was ideal because student motivation levels were generally higher in the beginning of the school year. Based on experience, students' motivational levels tend to decrease as the school year progresses. While not showing drastic change, there was measurable growth. Cooperative learning and multiple intelligence instruction, applied in any classroom, should enhance the learning process. Some of the skills students acquired through cooperative learning instruction included enhanced social skills, improved ability of self-expression, team building skills, and toleration of other people's

opinions. Students were more interested in class instruction using multiple intelligence activities because of the variety of lessons presented and the change in the regular structure of the classroom.

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Appendix A
Student Survey

As we begin a new school year, we are interested in your answers to the following questions. Be honest and use your seventh grade experiences to help you answer them. Please circle your responses. This is an anonymous survey, so please do not put your name on it.

1. How concerned are you about your grades?
   Very Somewhat Not Really

2. How concerned are your parents about your grades?
   Very Somewhat Not Really

3. How often do your parents ask you about your school day?
   Every day 2-3 times weekly Once a week Never

4. How often do you turn in your homework?
   Always Most of the time Sometimes Never

5. How often do your parents ask you if you have homework?
   Every day 2-3 times weekly Once a week Never

6. How often do your parents check to see if your homework is completed?
   Every day 2-3 times weekly Once a week Never

7. How often do you ask your parents for help with your homework?
   Every day 2-3 times weekly Once a week Never

8. How much time do you spend on homework on an average day?
   Over an hour ½ - 1 hour ½ hour or less None

9. How often does your homework suffer because of other activities?
   Often Sometimes Never

10. How often do you ask questions when you do not understand?
    Often Sometimes Never

11. How often do you participate in class?
    Often Sometimes Never

12. How often do you ask for help outside of class?
    Often Sometimes Never

13. How often do you call Classroom Connection?
    Often Sometimes Never

14. How often do you miss school during a nine-week period?
Over 5 days 3-5 days 1-3 days None

15. How important is completing your homework?
Very Somewhat Not Really

16. I do better when I work with others
Often Sometimes Never

17. I have a specific place to do my homework
Yes No

18. My classes are usually interesting
Often Sometimes Never

19. My feelings towards my teachers are
Generally good NeutralGenerally Bad

20. Why do you complete or not complete your homework assignments? Explain.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix B

Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire

The following questions ask about your motivation in this class. There are no right or wrong answers. Please circle the answer that describes you the best.

1. It is important for me to learn things taught in this class.

   Not true Sort of True True

2. If I study the way I am supposed to, then I will be able to learn things in this class.

   Not true Sort of True True

3. I think I will be able to use what I learn in this class in other classes.

   Not true Sort of True True

4. I believe I will earn an excellent grade in this class.

   Not true Sort of True True

5. It is my own fault if I don't learn what is being taught in this class.

   Not true Sort of True True

6. I like the things we study in this class.

   Not true Sort of True True

7. Understanding the things we study in this class is very important to me.

   Not true Sort of True True

8. If I don't understand things in class, it is because I didn't try hard enough.

   Not true Sort of True True

9. I am sure I can understand even the most difficult things taught by my instructor in this class.

   Not true Sort of True True

10. If I try hard enough, then I will understand what we study in this class.

    Not true Sort of True True

11. I think the things we learn in this class are useful for me to learn.

Not true Sort of True True

12. The most important thing for me right now is improving my grades, so my main concern in this class is getting a good grade.

Not true Sort of True True

13. When I have the chance in this class, I choose assignments that I can learn from even if I know I might not get a good grade.

Not true Sort of True True

14. I am certain I can learn the things being taught in this class.

Not true Sort of True True

15. I want to do well in this class because it is important to show how well I can do to my parents, my family, or my friends.

Not true Sort of True True

16. I am sure I can learn the basic things taught in this class.

Not true Sort of True True

17. I am sure I can do an excellent job on the assignments and tests in this class.

Not true Sort of True True

18. In this class, I would rather study things that I am curious about, even if they are difficult to learn.

Not true Sort of True True

19. If I can, I want to get better grades in this class than most of the other students.

Not true Sort of True True

20. I am very interested in the things we learn in this class.

Not true Sort of True True

21. The most important thing for me to do in this class is to try to understand what we study as completely as possible.

Not true Sort of True True

22. If I study the way I am supposed to, then I will be able to learn things in this class.

Not true Sort of True True

23. Getting a good grade in this class would be a really good thing for me right now.

Not true Sort of True True

24. I think I will be able to use what I learn in this class in other classes.

Not true Sort of True True

25. I am certain I can understand the most difficult things presented in this class.

Not true Sort of True True

Adapted from The Regents if The University of Michigan © 1991
Components of Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire

Component: Intrinsic Goal Orientation

Intrinsic goal orientation concerns the level on which a student perceives himself to be participating in a task for reasons such as challenge, curiosity, or mastery.

Items

4. I believe I will earn an excellent grade in this class
13. When I have the chance in this class, I choose assignments that I can learn from even if I know I might not get a good grade.
18. In this class, I would rather study things that I am curious about, even if they are difficult to learn.
21. The most important thing for me to do in this class is to try to understand what we study as completely as possible.

Component: Extrinsic Goal Orientation

Extrinsic Goal Orientation concerns the level on which the student perceives himself to be participating in a task for reasons such as competition, rewards, or grades.

Items

7. Understanding the things we study in this class is very important to me.
12. The most important thing for me right now is improving my grades, so my main concern in this class is getting a good grade.
15. I want to do well in this class because it is important to show how well I can do to my parents, my family, or my friends.
19. If I can, I want to get better grades in this class than most of the other students.

Component: Task Value

Task value refers to the student's evaluation or perception of how interesting, important, or useful a task is.

Items

1. It is important for me to learn the things taught in this class.
6. I like the things we study in this class.
7. Understanding the things we study in this class is very important to me.

11. I think the things we learn in this class are useful for me to learn.
20. I am very interested in the things we learn in this class.
24. I think I will be able to use what I learn in this class in other classes.

Component: Control of Learning Beliefs

Control of learning refers to students' beliefs that efforts to complete tasks will result in positive outcomes.

Items

3. I think I will be able to use what I Learn in this class in other classes..
8. If I don't understand things in class, it is because I didn't try hard enough.
10. If I try hard enough, then I will understand what we study in this class.
22. If I study the way I am supposed to, then I will be able to learn things in this class.

Component: Self-Efficacy for Learning and Performance

Self-efficacy is a student's self-evaluation of his ability to master a task.

Items

2. If I study the way I am supposed to, then I will be able to learn things in this class.
5. I expect to do well in this class.
9. I am sure I can understand even the most difficult things taught by my instructor in this class.
14. I am certain I can learn the things being taught in this class.
16. I am sure I can learn the basic things taught in this class.
17. I am sure I can do an excellent job on the assignments and tests in this class.
25. I am certain I can understand the most difficult things presented in this class

Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire Summary

Student Id#_____

Component: Intrinsic Goal Orientation

4_____ 13_____ 18_____ 21_____

Component: Extrinsic Goal Orientation

7_____ 12_____ 15_____ 19_____

Component: Task Value

1_____ 6_____ 7 _____ 11_____ 20_____ 24_____

Component: Control of Learning Beliefs

3_____ 8_____ 10_____ 22_____

Component: Self-Efficacy for Learning and Performance

2_____ 5_____ 9 _____ 14_____ 16_____ 17_____

25_____

Component Totals

IN = _____

EX = _____

TV = _____

CLB = _____

SELF = _____

TOTAL SCORE = _____

Appendix C
Teacher Survey

As we begin a new school year, we are looking for teacher input for our graduate class. We would appreciate your answering these questions and returning the survey to us by XXXX, XXX. Thank you in advance for your cooperation and participation.

1. How often do you assign homework?
   Never Seldom Sometimes Often Every day
   Comments:

2. Homework represents what percent of the total grade in your class?
   Less than 25% 26-50% 51-75% More than 75%
   Comments:

3. Do you accept late assignments?
   Yes No
   Comments:

4. Is there a penalty for late work?
   Yes No
   Comments:

5. How often do you ask a student to stay after school to make up a late or missing assignment?
   Never Sometimes Frequently
   Comments:

6. How much of a problem is missing/late/incomplete work in your classes?
   Not at all Minor problem Moderate problem Major Problem

Comments:

7. Do you typically allow some class time to begin homework?
   Yes No
   Comments:

8. Do you encourage parents to help student complete their homework?
   Yes No
   Comments:

9. Approximately how many parent contacts do you make in a week (phone, written, conference, weekly grade sheets, assignment notebooks, etc.)?
   0 1-5 5-10 More than 10
   Comments:

10. When you initiate a parent contact, how many attempts will you make?
    1 2-4 5 or more
    Comments:

11. On a daily basis, what percentage of students exhibit poor class participation?
    Less than 10% 10% - 30% 30-50% More than 50%
    Comments:

12. During a typical quarter in a single class, how many students experience poor academic achievement (D's or F's)?
    None 1-3 4-6 Over 6
    Comments:

Appendix D

Multiple Intelligence Inventory

This test will help you identify your area of strongest intelligence. Read each statement. If it expresses some trait of yours and sounds true (for the most part), place a "T" in the blank next to the statement. If the statement does not describe you, mark an "F" in the blank. If the statement is partially true or partially false, leave the question blank.

1. _____ I am usually aware of the expression on my face
2. _____ I like to work puzzles and play games.
3. _____ I often connect a piece of music to some event in my life.
4. _____ I have a good sense of what others think of me.
5. _____ I am sensitive to the expressions on other people's faces.
6. _____ I am good at athletics.
7. _____ I would rather draw a map than give someone verbal directions.
8. _____ It is easy for me to express what I fell in an argument or debate.
9. _____ I enjoy building models (or sculpting).
10. _____ I can associate music with my different moods.
11. _____ I am sensitive to the moods of other.
12. _____ I like to work with numbers, problems, figures and equations.
13. _____ If I am angry or happy, I usually can pinpoint the reason.
14. _____ I am good at finding the fine points of word meanings.
15. _____ Just looking at different architecture and shapes is enjoyable to me.
16. _____ I stay in touch with my mood and have no trouble identifying them,
17. _____ I enjoy writing detailed letters or notes to friends.
18. _____ I like to hum, whistle, and sing in the shower when I am alone.
19. _____ I like to sit quietly and reflect.
20. _____ I can play (or used to play) a musical instrument.
21. _____ Learning to ride a bike (or skate, skateboard, etc.) was easy.
22. _____ I can look at an object from one direction and visualize how it would look turned sideways or backwards.
23. _____ I can add or multiply quickly in my head,
24. _____ I often see patterns and relationships between numbers faster and easier than other.
25. _____ I can help friends sort of their feelings because I successfully deal with similar feelings myself.
26. _____ My sense of balance and coordination are good.
27. _____ I like to work with calculators and computers.
28. _____ I can convince others to follow my plans.
29. _____ I pick up new dance steps easily.
30. _____ I am irritated when I hear an argument or statement that sounds illogical.
31. _____ I enjoy a good lecture, speech, or sermon.

32. _____ I always know north from south no matter where I am.
33. _____ I like to gather together groups of people for get-togethers.
34. _____ Life seems empty without music.
35. _____ I always understand the drawings that come with new gadgets or appliances.

Scoring Sheet

Circle each item that you marked as "true". Add you totals. A total of four in any of the categories indicates a strong ability.

A	B	C	D	E	F	G
8	23	7	29	20	13	33
31	27	32	21	10	25	28
30	2	35	26	34	19	5
14	24	22	9	3	1	11
17	12	15	6	18	16	4
Totals	___	___	___	___	___	___	___

A = Verbal / Linguistic Intelligence

B = Logical / Mathematical Intelligence

C = Visual / Spatial Intelligence

D = Bodily / Kinesthetic Intelligence

E = Musical / Rhythmic Intelligence

F = Intrapersonal Intelligence

G = Interpersonal Intelligence

Adapted from If the Shoe Fits by C. Chapman © 1993

Appendix E
PARENT SURVEY

As we begin a new school year, we would appreciate input on how you view your involvement in your child's education. Please take a few minutes to complete this survey and return it with your child as soon as possible. We welcome any additional comments you may wish to make. Thank you in advance for your time and effort.

1. How often do you call the Classroom Connection homework line?

   Never Seldom Sometimes Frequently Every day

2. How often do you ask your child about his/her day?

   Never Seldom Sometimes Frequently Every day

3. How often do you check your child's assignment notebook?

   Never Seldom Sometimes Frequently Every day

4. How often do you check to see if your child's homework is complete?

   Never Seldom Sometimes Frequently Every day

5. How often do you help your child with homework?

   Never Seldom Sometimes Frequently Every day

6. How often do you check the quality of your child's homework?

   Never Seldom Sometimes Frequently Every day

7. How often do you check your child's binder for organization?

   Never Seldom Sometimes Frequently Every day

8. How often do you contact a teacher concerning your child's academic progress?

   Never Seldom Sometimes Frequently Every day

9. Do you feel welcome when you visit or contact your child's school?

   Never Seldom Sometimes Frequently Every day

10. How often do you ask your child about his/her academic standings in all of his/her classes?

    Never Seldom Sometimes Frequently Every day

Appendix F
Sample Grade Report

STUDENT PROGRESS REPORT
Wednesday, April 12, 2000

MISS DERNOVISH

Overall Grade 94.5% A

Grade Summary

Summary Item	Grade
Overall Grade	94.5% A
• Category: Test & Quiz	92.3% A-
• Category: Homework	97.7% A+
• Category: Classwork	95.1% A
• Completed Work Avg.	94.5% A
• Missing Assignments	0

Grade Scale: A+>=96, A>=93, A->=89, B+>=86, B>=83, B->=79, C+>=76, C>=73, C->=69, D+>=66, D>=63, D->=59, F>=0

Term 3 Assignments

#	Date	Category	Assignment	Score	Grade
1	1/18	Homework	Name Mitten	10/10	100.0% A+
2	1/19	Homework	M.I. Brain	8/10	80.0% B-
3	1/20	Homework	M.I. Summary	20/20	100.0% A+
4	1/21	Classwork	Verbal/Linguistic Reflection	10/10	100.0% A+
5	1/24	Homework	Logical Worksheet	10/10	100.0% A+
6	1/28	Homework	Journal Entries #10 &11	10/10	100.0% A+
7	1/31	Homework	Active Reading Strategies	15/15	100.0% A+
8	2/3	Homework	Journal questions 5,6,12,&14	10/10	100.0% A+
9	2/22	Test & Quiz	Quotation Marks Test	103/110	93.6% A
10	2/23	Classwork	Correction of the test	4/5	80.0% B-
11	2/24	Classwork	Ch.14 Grammar Ex. 1-3	26/30	86.7% B+
12	2/28	Classwork	Thank You Letter	10/10	100.0% A+
13	2/29	Classwork	Ch. 14 Grammar Ex. 8-13	27/30	90.0% A-
14	3/2	Test & Quiz	Chapter 14 Grammar Test	40/45	88.9% B+
15	3/8	Classwork	Couplet Poems	20/20	100.0% A+
16	3/17	Classwork	Poetry Unit complete (14 po..	57/57	100.0% A+
17	3/17	Classwork	Book Presentation		Extra Credit

Comments

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Appendix G
Student Letter

September 6, 1999

Dear Students,

Welcome to the 8 Gold Team! We hope it will be a fulfilling year for you. We are looking forward to a productive and successful year.

We are currently in the process of obtaining our master's degrees. As part of this process, we will be conducting an action research project during class. From time to time we may be asking for your input concerning your academic standing and your study habits. While conducting this research project you may be interviewed, observed, and possibly photographed or videotaped in the learning process.

This study will involve the successful completion of all homework assigned and an increase in your motivational levels. Study and organizational skills will also be emphasized. An assignment notebook and 3-ring binder will be required of all students. A variety of teaching strategies will be incorporated in the classroom to obtain these goals. Please be aware that your involvement in this project will not affect your grades in these courses and confidentiality will be assured.

Again we are truly looking forward to an exciting year for all of us. Please do not hesitate to talk to us if you have a question, comment, or suggestion. With all of us working together, your learning experiences will be positive.

Sincerely,

Miss Julie Dernovish & Mrs. Annette Epperly

8 Gold English 8 Gold Math

Appendix H
Parent Letter

September 6, 1999

Dear Parents / Guardians,

Welcome to the 8 Gold Team! We hope it will be a fulfilling year for you, your child, and us. We are looking forward to a productive and successful year.

We are currently in the process of obtaining our master's degrees. As part of this process, we will be conducting an action research project involving your child. From time to time we may be asking for your input concerning your child's academic standing and study habits. While conducting this research project your child may be interviewed, observed, and possibly photographed or videotaped in the learning process.

This study will involve the successful completion of all homework assigned and an increase in student motivational levels. Study and organizational skills will also be emphasized. An assignment notebook and 3-ring binder will be required of all students. A variety of teaching strategies will be incorporated in the classroom to obtain these goals.

Again we are truly looking forward to an exciting year for all of us. We will keep the lines of communication open, as we hope you will too. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have a question, comment, or suggestion. With all of us working together, your child's learning experiences will be positive.

Sincerely,

Miss Julie Dernovish & Mrs. Annette Epperly
8 Gold English 8 Gold Math